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Playboy Drug Investigation 'Spinoff' From Other Probe

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A major federal narcotics investigation involving Hugh M. Hefner's Playboy empire began as an accidential "spinoff" from another federal investigation of a cocaine smuggling ring, Justice Department sources said today.

In an emotional press conference in Chicago Tuesday, Hefner accused the government of a "politically motivated witch hunt" and blamed it for the death of his secretary, Bobbie Arnstein, who died Monday, apparently from a self-inflicted drug overdose.

Justice Department sources confirmed that the federal Drug Enforcement Administration had carried out an 18-month investigation of the possibility that drugs were distributed and used in Playboy clubs and in Hefner's two Playboy mansions, one on Chicago's Gold Coast and the other in Beverly Hills, Calif., and that a grand jury has been hearing evidence in the case in Chicago for six weeks.

THEY ALSO confirmed that a federal organized crime strike force in Chicago — a unit whose activities are controlled from the department's criminal division in Washington — had been involved at least in the early stages of the investigation.

The investigation reportedly centers on the possibility that cocaine, as well as amphetamines, had been provided to preferred customers at some of the Playboy clubs or to guests at the mansions — more as a courtesy or a service than as a money-making operation.

Hollywood celebrities, as well as present and former Hefner employes, are reported to have been called as witnesses before the grand jury.

The investigation was triggered by another case in 1971 in which strike force agents in Chicago were working with drug agents in trying to break up a ring suspected of smuggling cocaine into this country from Bolivia by way of Jamaica.

As a result of that investigation, which involved the use of court-approved wiretaps, Miss Arnstein and three men were indicted for conspiracy to sell cocaine.

BEFORE the trial began, one of the men, George Matthews, pleaded guilty and cooperated with the prosecution and his testimony, according to government attorneys, was generally borne out by conversations on the tapes although they were in a kind of jargon.

Key evidence in that trial involved the delivery of a half pound of cocaine from the Chicago Playboy mansion to a man cooperating with the drug agents and the return of the payoff money to the mansion.

—United Press International

Playboy publisher Hugh Hefner helps carry casket of Bobbie Arnstein at services in Chicago.